

Freedom of British India through the Lens of the Khaskar Movement

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Abstract

Historically, the liberation of British India in 1947 has been primarily credited to the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress, who were involved in the negotiations for partition with the British Government. By contrast, this article follows the events leading up to the freedom of British India as seen through the lens of Allama Mashraqi and his Khaksar Movement. It examines the grassroots efforts of Mashraqi and the Khaksars to mobilize the Indian nation towards freedom as well as the Government's attempts to crush the Movement. Ultimately, the article concludes that the true liberation of British India was not merely the result of negotiations or "drawing room politics," but rather an outcome of the continued resistance of the Khaksars and other political parties.

Freedom of British India through the Lens of the Khaskar Movement

This article examines the role of Allama Mashraqi and his Khaksar Movement in the freedom of British India. The topic has thus far been largely ignored by historians in India and Pakistan and therefore offers a fresh lens with which to analyze the liberation of the Indian nation from British rule in 1947. Credit for freedom has thus far been primarily attributed to the All-India Muslim League (AIML) and the Indian National Congress (INC), who had been engaged in the negotiations for partition with the British Government. I argue, however, that – more so than the political negotiations - the true foundation for freedom was made possible by the continued resistance of Allama Mashraqi and his Khaksar Tehreek (along with other political parties and pressure groups). Therefore, this article begins with Mashraqi's early career and analyzes the events leading up to the liberation of India in 1947 to show that the British decision to transfer power would not have been possible without the intense pressure applied upon the Government by Mashraqi.

Mashraqi's Early Years and the Developing Rift with the Government

Inayatullah Khan, or Allama Mashraqi (Scholar of the East) as he was more commonly known, was born into a well-to-do family in India and educated at Christ's College, University of Cambridge (England). He started his career in 1913 as Vice Principal of Islamia College in Peshawar. Mashraqi quickly gained popularity in this position and soon became Principal. Later, he was appointed as Under Secretary of Education for the Government of British India. As Under Secretary, Mashraqi's relationship with the British Government deteriorated on policy matters. Consequently, the Government relegated him to a lesser position as Headmaster of

Government High School in Peshawar. While Mashraqi's goodwill within the British Government was declining, his popularity among the people of Peshawar remained strong.

In 1920, there was an influx of people towards Afghanistan in support of the Khilafat Movement. Because of Mashraqi's popularity, the Government tried to use him to prevent the migration. In return, they offered him the Ambassadorship to Afghanistan in 1920 followed by Knighthood in 1921 (Yousaf 2003, 50).¹ Mashraqi declined both offers, refusing to compromise his principles and values to achieve personal gain. Mashraqi's refusal could not have been taken well in the British circle.

Mashraqi's relationship with the Government deteriorated further when he led a delegation to the Motamar Khilafat Conference in Cairo in May of 1926 and delivered his memorable speech, *Khitab-e-Misr*. According to author Syed Shabbir Hussain, "The British became wary of his [Mashraqi's] programme after his address at the Cairo Motamar where the British wanted a king of their own liking to head Khilafat after it had been disowned by the Turks, and which plan was frustrated primarily due to the acceptance of Mashriqi's programme" (Hussain 1988, 265).² From Egypt, Mashraqi went on to Europe. A few years later, in 1930, he resigned from Government service.

Formation and Spread of the Khaksar Movement

Since the time of his graduation from Cambridge, Mashraqi had observed the leaders in India. He came to realize that they were only motivated by power and were not looking out for the best interests of the nation. Mashraqi's disgust with the leadership led him to the conclusion that he had to start his own movement, a movement that would serve the interests of the Indian people and change the destiny of the nation. Thus, in 1930 - the same year that he resigned from Government service - Mashraqi founded his Khaksar Movement (Khaksar Tehreek) to free the

people of the Indian subcontinent from the clutches of foreign yoke and convert his nation into a ruling power.

Mashraqi devoted many years mobilizing people and spreading the Khaksar Tehreek, inculcating in his followers a commitment to strict discipline, community service, devotion to the cause, and love for all. Mashraqi particularly laid emphasis on character building, as he recognized that one of the major downfalls of any nation is a lack of character. To him, no nation could ever become a ruling power unless it possessed strong character. Mashraqi's aim and objectives appealed to the Indians (including non-Muslims) and under his leadership, the Movement quickly gained momentum.

Feeling threatened by the Khaksar Tehreek's political ambitions and increasing popularity, the Government of NWFP was the first of the Provincial Governments to impose restrictions against the Khaksars (on October 15, 1932) (Mashraqi 1977, 34). The Government also began to keep a close watch on Khaksar activities. This is evidenced by the Government intelligence agency's report of November 10, 1933 entitled *Note on the Khaksar Movement*. The report stated that the Government had been repeatedly warned that Mashraqi's "ultimate object is far from innocuous and he has been unable at times to conceal his hostility towards the British Raj [rule]." It added that the Khaksar Tehreek called for "unquestioning obedience" and its aim was pan-Islamic. The report further expressed concern that Mashraqi was creating a disciplined force of such massive "proportions" that could eventually be commanded in any direction as seen fit by Mashraqi (Asia, Pacific & Africa Collections [APAC], IOL MSS EUR F 161/164, "Note on the Khaksar Movement," p. 3, 6).

Perceiving the Khaksars to be a growing threat, the Government banned Mashraqi's entry into the North West Frontier Province (APAC, IOL MSS EUR F 161/164, "Note on the Khaksar

Movement by G. Ahmed,” January 15, 1939, p. 16). Upset by this ruling, Mashraqi protested, but the ban remained intact. Mashraqi decided to give the Government some time to reconsider its decision, but they still refused to remove the ban. After waiting a significant amount of time, in July 1937, Mashraqi finally set a deadline of August 15, 1937 (APAC, IOL MSS EUR F 161/164, “Note on the Khaksar Movement by G. Ahmed,” January 15, 1939, p. 16; *Note on the Khaksar Movement* 1940, prepared by L.V. Deane, p. 13) for the Government to remove the restrictions on him. Otherwise, he would disregard the ban and come to NWFP.

On August 13, 1937, a Khaksar delegation met with the Premier and conveyed Mashraqi’s message. A few days later, on August 20, 1937, the Government withdrew the restrictions. Thus, Mashraqi and the Khaksar Tehreek had emerged victorious in their first major challenge of the NWFP Government. This increased Mashraqi’s popularity as well as the Tehreek’s position in NWFP. Mashraqi arrived in Peshawar on August 29, 1937 where he was accorded a rousing welcome. The people of NWFP were elated, as Mashraqi was once again able to travel to the area where he himself had spent quite some time as an educationist.

The Government’s attempts to restrict the Khaksar Tehreek did not deter the growth of the Movement. By the late 1930s, the Tehreek was at its peak, with millions of followers and supporters all across India. It had also established branches in foreign countries. Indeed the highly disciplined Khaksar Tehreek had become the most powerful organization in British India. *Pakistan Times*, a daily newspaper from Lahore, wrote on August 25, 1963, “...the [Khaksar] movement developed into a formidable force within five years. By 1938, it had assumed explosive dimensions...Once it looked that the entire field of Muslim politics was in the grip of this movement.” Shan Muhammed also writes in his book *Khaksar Movement in India*, “It [Khaksar Tehreek] became a most powerful organisation towards the closing years of the thirties

and dominated the field...” (Muhammad 1973, V). According to the *Eastern Times* (Lahore) of November 1, 1942, “He [Mashraqi] asserted that 40 lakh [four million] persons had joined his movement and they carried the red badge on their shoulders.” The volunteer organization was completely united and devoted to its cause.

Without a doubt, Mashraqi had awakened the nation from its deep slumber to rise against the British rule. The Khaksar Tehreek had set the path to freedom; following the Khaksars’ example, many other volunteer organizations began to emerge. For instance, in 1938, the All-India Muslim League (AIML) followed in the Tehreek’s footsteps and organized its own Muslim League National Guard. The increasing strength of the volunteer organizations in India is evidenced by a note on the “Volunteer Movement in India,” which was prepared by British intelligence in December 1938. The report mentioned that the volunteer movements in India were *growing in numbers and strength*. It also commented on the recent “considerable activity on the part of the Muslim League in organizing their own volunteer corps” (APAC, IOR L/P&J/8/678, prepared by Intelligence Bureau, p. 147-157; APAC, IOR NEG 540, prepared by Intelligence Bureau, p. 147-157). With regards to the Khaksars, it stated that their aim was to unite the Muslims to become the “ruling power” (APAC, IOR L/P&J/8/678, prepared by Intelligence Bureau, p. 147-157; APAC, IOR NEG 540, prepared by Intelligence Bureau, p. 147-157).

The tremendous expansion of volunteer organizations in India was becoming a matter of grave concern for British authorities in India. On December 31, 1938, the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General (Public), in a secret letter, forwarded the note on the “Volunteer Movement in India” to His Majesty’s Under Secretary of State for India (London) for the information of the Secretary of State.

The British truly came to realize the strength of the Khaksar Movement in 1939. In this year, the Khaksars challenged the Government of United Provinces' (U.P.) authority for failing to control the ongoing Shia-Sunni riots in Lucknow (United Provinces, India). Mashraqi then went to Lucknow himself and settled the issue (though anti-Khaksar elements denied this). This was an embarrassment for the Government and they perceived it to be an intervention into their affairs. The Government arrested Mashraqi on September 01, 1939 (Yousaf 2004, 66), but released him the next day.

Soon after Mashraqi's departure from Lucknow, the Congress Ministry announced that he had been released from jail after rendering an apology. Upon hearing of the false proclamation that he had rendered any sort of apology to the Government, Mashraqi returned to U.P. in order to prove that he had not issued an apology. He was once again arrested (on September 13, 1939 at Malihabad near Lucknow) (Yousaf 2004, 68), thus triggering the Khaksar-Congress Ministry conflict that eventually resulted in the resignation of the ministry. This is obvious from the Governor of U.P.'s secret letter to the Viceroy of India dated November 08, 1939. The Governor wrote that the Khaksar issue was a "great embarrassment" for the Government. The Governor also mentioned that the ministers felt that their authority was being "jeopardized and questioned" by the Khaksars. Thus, the Governor decided to accept the ministers' resignation (APAC, IOL MSS EUR F125/102, "Governor of U.P.'s Letter to Linlithgow [Viceroy of India]," p. 380-381).

Mashraqi and the Khaksars' interference in forcibly stopping the Shia-Sunni riots and bringing down the ministry greatly enhanced their prestige among the public. It sent a signal to the masses that the authority of the British Government could be challenged. As a result, enrollment in the Khaksar Tehreek jumped. Mashraqi underscored the increasing strength of the

Khaksar Tehreek by announcing that they would be enrolling 2.5 million more Khaksars by June, 1940. This created further alarm in Government and anti-Khaksar circles.

Within nine years of its creation, the Khaksar Movement had achieved a tremendous amount of success, amassing millions of followers and supporters. Sensing the threat that the Tehreek posed to their rule, the Government of Punjab (under the patronage of the Government of British India) cracked down on Mashraqi and the Khaksars. The Punjab Premier and member of the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, imposed a ban on Khaksar activities in early 1940; the Khaksars considered this to be unjust and decided to oppose it.

The Road to Freedom

On March 19, 1940, a contingent of 313 Khaksars held a parade in Lahore. Police arrived at the scene to stop the Khaksars and opened fire on them. They killed or injured many of the Khaksars, whose only defense against the barrage of police bullets was their spades. In his book entitled *Friends and Foes*, K.L. Gauba (Member Punjab Legislative Assembly) writes, “According to eye witnesses the dead [Khaksars] were more than 200.” The figures that the Punjab Government actually announced weren’t even close to what Gauba mentions (APAC, IOL MSS EUR F125/89, p. 36, 106-107).³

The March 19th incident left the Government alarmed and in a state of panic. They wasted no time in pouncing on the Khaksars. Following the massacre, on the same day, police and army troops raided the Khaksar Tehreek’s headquarters in Lahore. Those Khaksars who were present, as well as Mashraqi’s son (Ehsanullah Khan Aslam), protested against the raid. Police used tear-gas grenades to make arrests. Ehsanullah Khan Aslam was hit by a tear-gas grenade and was seriously injured.⁴ Police arrested the Khaksars and Mashraqi’s sons. Mashraqi,

who was in Delhi at the time, was arrested at night as well and taken to Vellore Jail in Madras. Furthermore, on the very day of the massacre, the Governor of Punjab sent telegrams to the Secretary of State of India in London, the Governor General/Viceroy of India, and the Governors of the North West Frontier Province, Sind, and United Provinces informing them of the Khaksar-Police clash in Lahore (APAC, IOL MSS EUR F125/89; APAC, IOR NEG 1276, p. 37; APAC, IOL L/I/1/629; APAC, IOR NEG 13027, p. 50).

In the days following the March 19th massacre, the Punjab Government continued arresting Khaksars and confiscating Khaksar materials in various cities throughout Punjab. Within a few weeks, almost two thousand Khaksars⁵ had been arrested. Police even arrested supporters of the Khaksars.

The police arrests did not deter the Khaksar resistance and they continued with their daily demonstrations. Many Khaksars from other Provinces, particularly NWFP, arrived in Punjab to join the demonstrations. The purpose of the demonstrations was to secure Mashraqi and the Khaksars' release and to obtain the removal of the ban on the Khaksar Tehreek. The demonstrations were also meant to simultaneously send a clear message to the nation to rise for freedom and to the Government that the Khaksars would not rest until British rule in India came to an end.

Understanding the Khaksar aims, the Government of British India supported the Punjab Government's prompt actions. The Punjab Government also sought help from other Provincial Governments in an attempt to crush the Tehreek. Numerous secret telegrams and letters were briskly exchanged between Governors, the Viceroy of India, and the Secretary of State in England. Intelligence agencies were alerted and they became highly active. The entire British

Government was shaken by the Khaksar confrontation and the Government aggressively sought to eliminate the Khaksar Tehreek.

On May 26, 1940, the Viceroy of India held a conference with Governors, the Commander-in-Chief and other top British officials to formulate actions and take immediate steps to control the Khaksar threat. Already in the midst of World War II, the Government knew that it wouldn't be able to fight on another front. It was concluded that the central government should urgently consider the following (APAC, IOL L/P&J/8/680, "The Khaksar Problem [meeting minutes]," May 26, 1940, p. 151-161):

1. Instructing all provinces to arrest local Khaksar leaders
2. Arresting six or seven professors at the Aligarh University for promoting the Khaksar cause
3. Directing United Provinces to watch Khaksar entry into Punjab
4. Ensuring a close and effective liaison between provincial intelligence agencies

Meanwhile, Mashraqi remained in jail. During this time, his son, Ehsanullah Khan Aslam, succumbed to injuries and died on May 31, 1940 (Yousaf 2003, 53). Mashraqi was not allowed to take a last glimpse of his son and he was buried in Mashraqi's absence. The Government's actions were intended to intimidate Mashraqi into disbanding the Khaksar Tehreek. They were testing Mashraqi's courage and resolve, and though he grieved dearly for his son, he bore the Government's punishment with unparalleled audacity.

On September 02, 1940, as a result of the Khaksars' ongoing demonstrations, the ban on the Tehreek was removed and *some* Khaksars were released. However, the Government refused to release Mashraqi and many other Khaksars, including those sentenced to life imprisonment. Towards the end of February and early March, 1941, Mashraqi became seriously ill in jail and his health deteriorated. It was further reported that Mashraqi had been given poisonous medicine,

which would result in his slow death. When this news was revealed, the Khaksars were highly perturbed (Akhtar 2003, 426).

Desperate efforts - including protests, Khaksar fasts, and the observance of “Mashraqi Day” (on May 2, 1941) (*Star of India* [Calcutta, India], May 3, 1941) –further strengthened the pressure on the Government for Mashraqi’s release. The Khaksars took every possible measure to liberate their beloved leader; when his release didn’t come through, they decided to undertake a massive resistance - from the North West Frontier Province to Bengal. Intelligence agencies, which were monitoring Khaksar moves closely, informed the Government of British India of the Khaksars’ plan. This time (on June 05, 1941), the Central Government banned the Khaksar Tehreek in the entire India.

The Government was nervous that the ban on the Khaksar Tehreek would be used by anti-British elements within and outside the country (including Germany) to criticize British actions against the Khaksars. To counter public reaction following the ban, on June 05, 1941, the Secretary of State for India sent a telegram from London to the Home Department in India. In the telegram, he proposed to urgently secure public statements in support of the ban from prominent Muslims (APAC, IOL L/P&J/8/680, draft telegram, June 6, 1941, p. 98).⁶

Under the influence of the Government and other anti-Khaksar elements, the media wrote against the Khaksars. Despite the Government’s best efforts to the contrary, the Khaksars were determined to keep the Tehreek and its objectives alive. The efforts for the release of Mashraqi continued, but the Government refused to free Mashraqi and other convicted Khaksars. On October 16, 1941, Mashraqi, who had been kept in prison without a trial, began a penitential fast (*Dawn* [Delhi, India], January 25, 1942) in protest of the Government’s actions against the Khaksar Tehreek.

The Government tried to keep the news of Mashraqi's fast a secret, but it wasn't long before word reached the public. Important Hindu leaders B. Sambamurthi (ex-Speaker of the Madras legislature), Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, and Gadde Rangiah Naidu (Member Legislative Assembly) - who had also been under detention with Mashraqi - leaked the news of his fast upon their release in November, 1941 (*Dawn* [Delhi, India], November 23, 1941; *Dawn* [Delhi, India], June 7, 1942; *Tribune* [Lahore], November 14, 1941).

On the fiftieth day of his fast (Hussain 1991, 152, see Mashraqi's statement), Mashraqi was taken on a stretcher from Vallore Jail to a dingy cell in Madras. The purpose was to intimidate him to either dissolve the movement and give up his fast or die. Barrister Mian Ahmad Shah, a Khaksar leader, described Mashraqi's condition in a letter to Sir Richard Tottenham dated December 21, 1941. Barrister Shah wrote, "His [Mashriqi's] condition as I have seen him is dangerously serious and nothing remains in his body except tissues..." (Muhammad 1973, 85).

Meanwhile, Mashraqi wrote from jail to Dr. Rafiq Ahmed Khan of Aligarh Muslim University. He stated, "My last days are nearing. It will be alright if I receive a reply and I am released. Otherwise I am going to die . . . I am not going to change my decision nor do I repent for it. I am happy because I am going to lay down my life" At the conclusion of his letter, Mashraqi - determined to keep the cause alive - stated, "Again gird up your loins. Do not let my face be blackened. Save the honour of Islam..." (Muhammad 1973, 85).

On December 05, 1941, the Government communicated to Mashraqi to disband the Khaksar Movement or he would not be released. Mashraqi wrote back, "Khaksar Movement was not my property that I could do with it whatever I liked, nor can it be discontinued" (Hussain 1991, 152).

Indeed it seemed that no amount of Government pressure could stop the Khaksar Movement. The Government knew that they could not keep Mashraqi in jail forever, as he had never even been tried in a court of law. The Government, despite their best efforts, had been unable to bring any charges against him. Thus, Mashraqi, through sheer will and determination, brought the Government to a point where they could no longer keep him confined and were forced to release him. However, his movements remained restricted to the Madras Presidency.

Mashraqi finally emerged from solitary confinement on January 19, 1941 (after fasting in protest for 80 days). While under detention, Mashraqi had been tortured and manhandled. Further, his pension had been withheld and his family and followers had been barred from visiting him. He had even been forced to pay for his expenses in jail (Yousaf 2004, 234, see Mashraqi's letter to Sir Stafford Cripps). Despite the hardships he had to endure under detention, Mashraqi never showed any signs of surrendering or giving in to the Government pressure to disband the Khaksar Movement.

Following his release, Mashraqi renewed his political activities. In March of 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps arrived in British India (Cripps' Mission). The British Government wanted cooperation from the Indian people in order to deal with the World War II problem. The Government knew it would be difficult to be successful in the war without the help of the people of the Indian sub-continent. To seek their assistance, the Government sent Cripps with constitutional proposals. However, Mashraqi wanted no proposals from the British other than to quit India. On March 23, 1942, Mashraqi sent a telegram to Cripps stating, "...I now join the Muslim League, the Congress and the Mahasabha in most emphatically demanding *complete* independence of India" (Yousaf 2004, 234). Thus, on April 03, 1942, Mashraqi formally rejected

Cripps' proposals. The All-India Muslim League and Indian National Congress later did the same.

Mashraqi, who had always advocated Muslim-Hindu unity, was encouraged by the other parties' refusal of Cripps' offer. He sent a telegram (on April 11, 1942), to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Presidents of the Indian National Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, stating, "Your rejection of the Cripps proposals is the happiest augury to a united and peaceful India. Accept heartiest congratulations. I fully undertake the responsibility of securing by negotiation complete independence for India from the British Government within six months, provided the Congress, the League and the Mahasabha unitedly demand independence now, and of also non-communally organising for the safety of civil population everywhere. I offer immediately half a million Khaksars for service, irrespective of caste or creed...Do not miss this critical opportunity" (*Dawn* [Delhi, India], April 19, 1942).

Meanwhile, efforts to obtain the removal of the ban on Mashraqi's movements continued; the ban was finally removed on December 28, 1942. Arriving in Lahore, Mashraqi made a speech at Badshahi Mosque on January 08, 1943. He appealed to the Muslims and Hindus to unite (*Star of India* [Calcutta, India], January 9, 1943), and to not fall prey to the forces that were dividing them for vested reasons.⁷

Soon after the restrictions on Mashraqi's movements were lifted, Khaksar activities – including collective congregation, parades, lectures, and speeches – to mobilize the people for freedom increased tremendously. The Khaksars also held camps and mock wars, which were witnessed by thousands. The explosion of Khaksar activity did not go unnoticed, however. On July 05, 1943, the Viceroy wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for India, stating that he was not pleased with the Khaksar situation and that they must be dealt with. He also expressed his

concern regarding the possibility that the All-India Muslim League might take on a more belligerent policy toward the Government in the future as well. He further stated that the Muslim League might find a “powerful instrument, such as the Khaksars...ready to its hand,” in which case the Government will face “a most dangerous position.” He stressed that this was a “real danger” and should be monitored closely (APAC, IOL L/P&J/8/680, p. 19).

Prior to the Viceroy’s letter (of July 1943), Mashraqi had already been warned to stop the Khaksar activities. On July 19, 1943, he received another warning from the Government of India to stop the Khaksar camps, drills, and other activities. Nevertheless, the Khaksars continued their activities, with the exception of performing drills and wearing uniforms (in order to circumvent the ban on the Movement).

On September 12, 1943, the Home Department again wrote to Mashraqi, stressing that “no camps of any kind and for any purpose whatever shall be held.” The communication added that if the Khaksar violations continued, the Government may take action without further warning. On September, 29, 1943, Mashraqi responded that he could not accept the Government’s request and would not go any further in suspending military-style activities.

In spite of the Government’s warnings, Mashraqi remained committed to the cause and continued his efforts to obtain freedom for India. He again tried to unite the Muslims, Hindus and other non-Muslims in order to overthrow British rule. His efforts to unite the Indians were reported in the media and are also evident from correspondence he exchanged with Quaid-e-Azam, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and other prominent leaders. He made rigorous and continued efforts for a Jinnah-Gandhi meeting (which took place on September 09, 1944) (Yousaf 2004, 279), though historians on both sides (Pakistan and India) have ignored his efforts in this regard for reasons known to them. He urged them to attain unity and shed their political

differences. Unfortunately, Muslim and Hindu leaders failed to realize the importance of unity - for which Mashraqi pleaded with “folded hands” in his letters to Quaid-e-Azam and Mahatma Gandhi⁸ - in undoing the designs of the imperialists. Ultimately, the leaders would never resolve their differences, as anti-unification forces among the British Government, Muslim League and Congress always jumped in to jeopardize Mashraqi’s efforts.

In 1945, Mashraqi made another effort to bring unity and freedom to the Indians and prevent the partition of India: he framed *The Constitution of Free India 1946 A.C.* (also known as the *Khaksar Constitution*). Mashraqi felt that dividing India would have many serious repercussions. In order to achieve unity and satisfaction for all communities, the *Khaksar Constitution* provided for the protection of rights for all: Muslims, Hindus, Parsees, Christians, Jews, scheduled castes, etc. However, these efforts on the part of Mashraqi to unite the Indians were again thwarted by elements that wished to prevent the harmony and solidarity of the Indians. Thus, the Indian leaders remained divided.

The inability of the AIML and Congress leadership to resolve their differences at this crucial juncture was incomprehensible for Mashraqi and the Khaksars. Nevertheless, they recognized that the pressure on the Government had to be maintained. They knew that a strong, final push for freedom was needed in order to liberate the nation from British rule once and for all. So, Mashraqi took a series of steps to further intensify pressure on the Government and leave them with no choice but to grant freedom to the nation.

On May 22, 1946, Mashraqi issued a press statement emphasizing that the Khaksars would continue to fight for the nation and made an unconditional offer of Khaksars to Quaid-e-Azam:

“...If Mr. Jinnah agrees I shall throw the whole force into the matter unstintedly and every Khaksar will be ready to lay down his life for the cause of the country” (*Free Press Journal*, May 24, 1946; *Star of India* [Calcutta, India], May 23, 1946).

On June 06, 1946, Mashraqi again offered Khaksar services to Jinnah, stating:

“The Khaksars are prepared to sacrifice blood and undergo any amount of hardship provided Mr. Jinnah is earnest about his mission of Pakistan...my unconditional offer to place the entire services of the Khaksar organisation for attaining Pakistan still stands” (*Eastern Times* [Lahore], June 9, 1946).

Mashraqi's words reflect his and the Khaksars' complete and utter devotion to the cause of independence. They further show that Mashraqi made every effort to reach out to Jinnah, even though Mashraqi's idea of Pakistan was different than that of Jinnah and the Muslim League. However, it seemed that Jinnah was not interested in joining forces with the Khaksars. Despite Jinnah's unwillingness to cooperate, Mashraqi and the Khaksars did not waver in their efforts toward freedom.

In June of 1946, Mashraqi called the Azad Hind Fauj Conference (Hussain 1991, 222) at Khaksar *Idara-i-Aliya* (the Khaksar Tehreek's headquarters) in Lahore. The conference was another attempt to convey to the British that the Khaksars were determined to end British rule. During the same month (on June 10, 1946), Mashraqi spoke at a public meeting in Lahore. According to Syed Shabbir Hussain in *Al-Mashriqi: The Disowned Genius*, Mashraqi “traced the genesis of the Western trade imperialism and how with the capture of India by the British, Islamic States all over the world started crumbling. To him the emergence of Indian Muslims as a supreme factor would lead to an upsurge of Islamic renaissance everywhere” (Hussain 1991,

223). Mashraqi also expressed how the imperialist power callously and selfishly exploited all types of Indian resources (from human to economic).

In the meantime, the Muslim League, instead of joining forces with the Khaksars to demand freedom, rather joined the interim Government, which was formed by the Viceroy (they were sworn in on October 26, 1946). The marriage between the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress did not last long, however, and a political crisis soon emerged. When the Viceroy summoned the assembly on November, 20, 1946, Jinnah declared that the AIML would not attend. Then, in an attempt to resolve differences, the British asked four Indian leaders to come to London (on December 02, 1946): Quaid-e-Azam, Nehru, Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan and Sardar Baldev Singh. As these London talks got underway, it became evident that these leaders would not be able to reach an agreement (Hussain 1991, 224).⁹

Meanwhile, Mashraqi was losing patience with the worthless negotiations and drawing room politics. To him, negotiations would not bring any tangible results, let alone freedom. Mashraqi realized he had no choice left, but to opt for a revolt. Although it had not yet been publicly announced, hectic efforts to this end had been underway for quite some time. Furthermore, Mashraqi knew that in order to set the stage for a rebellion, he first had to ensure the unity of the Hindus and Muslims. On December 05, 1946, Mashraqi stated:

“London talks may fail and civil war is being openly predicted. If not restricted or averted it may prove not only the doom of India’s freedom but also India’s doom. I, therefore, order every Khaksar in India whether active, passive, sympathizer or reserved to stand up alert from the moment this order reaches him and gird up his loins to stop this slaughter even at the cost of his life. I want every man, woman and child, old or young, Hindu or Muslim or non-Muslim who has the

slightest sympathy with the Khaksar Movement to come forward, and stop this wholesale slaughter by offering his life and force of his character...Every Khaksar will be ready to die if Hindus and Muslims begin to fight anywhere. All newspapers will be destroyed publicly if they publish news of Hindu-Muslim riots. Children should sing poems prompting Hindu Muslim unity. Muslim and Hindu Khaksars should march side by side with their belchas and should proclaim that they have worked for sixteen years together and stand as monuments of Hindu-Muslim unity. Congress and Muslim League should be equally denounced if denounced at all. My conviction is that only Khaksars can avert such a disaster in India” (Hussain 1991, 224-225).

Mashraqi’s call to action was heeded by the Khaksars. They began daily parades with belchas in many cities in India. Then, on February 17, 1947, Dr. F.K. Abra (Chief of the Khaksar Organization in Bombay) was interviewed in Poona, where he was present in connection with a camp of Khaksar leaders. *The Free Press Journal* of February 18, 1947 reported:

“Over 125 Khaksar leaders from the Province are attending the camp. The object of this camp, said Dr. Abra, was to train the Khaksar officers to propagate Hindu-Muslim unity and communal harmony. Also it intended to train them up as to how to act during communal strifes. Dr. Abra also revealed that at a recent meeting of Khaksar leaders from over the country convened by their leader Allama Mashriqui at Lahore the question regarding the role to be adopted during such emergencies was discussed.”

Although open rebellion had not yet been declared, statements such as this one – along with the mobilization of Khaksars in the Indian army and Mashraqi’s meetings with Major

General S.D. Khan (of the Indian National Army) and Col. Ihsan Qadir in 1946 - clearly illustrate that preparations were well underway by this point. In response, the Government attempted to take desperate preventative measures by arresting Khaksars, but the momentum of the freedom movement had now become far too great. With the threat of a revolt at hand, the British finally came to realize that time had run out on their days of rule in India. The stage was now set for the transfer of power to the Indians. Thus, it was not drawing room politics, but rather the continued resistance of the Khaksars and others and the threat of a bloody revolt that ultimately compelled the British Government to surrender their rule in India.

On February 20, 1947, the British Prime Minister, Lord Clement Attlee, announced that the British Government intended to transfer power to Indians no later than June of 1948. While it seemed that freedom was now within reach, Mashraqi also realized that this transfer of power implied the division of India into three parts. Thus, in March of 1947 (*Dawn* [Delhi, India], July 2, 1947), he made one last attempt to keep India undivided: forcible takeover. Mashraqi ordered 300,000 Khaksars to assemble in Delhi by June 30, 1947. Meanwhile, on June 03, 1947, Lord Mountbatten (Viceroy of India) announced his plan for the partition of India. Mashraqi rejected the plan immediately. The Khaksars also protested at the Muslim League session on June 09, 1947, urging the League not to accept the truncated Pakistan.

The Government took every step to prevent the assembly of 300,000 Khaksars in Delhi, including arresting Mashraqi on June 11, 1947 (*Pakistan Times* [Lahore, Pakistan], June 12, 1947). They soon realized, however, that Mashraqi's arrest would incite Khaksar anger against the Government and could lead to an uncontrollable situation. So they freed Mashraqi, but intelligence agencies maintained a close watch on his every move. They also kept his family as well as the Khaksars under surveillance. Despite the Government's stringent measures, 70,000 to

80,000 Khaksars still managed to gather in Delhi, as was reported in the Press (*Dawn* [Delhi, India], July 2, 1947). This figure, though understated in the Press, still fell short of the required number of 300,000. The Government's preventative measures, along with a leak of the plan by anti-Khaksar forces, had stymied the Khaksar efforts to *undo* the Mountbatten Plan. *The Dawn*, Delhi, reported on July 02, 1947, "Khaksars were not allowed to hold their rally....Section 144 I.P.C. now in force in Delhi."

By this time, the All-India Muslim League and Congress had already accepted the Mountbatten Plan. Thus, Mashraqi's last effort to prevent the division of India (or at least obtain a bigger Pakistan) was not allowed to materialize. Mashraqi disbanded his Khaksar Movement on July 04, 1947. According to *The Tribune*, Lahore of July 05, 1947, Allama Mashraqi stated:

"About three and a half months ago I announced that if three lakhs of Khaksars would not have rallied in Delhi there would be no revolutionary power left in the movement and, therefore, it would be necessary to disband it. Now with the establishment of Pakistan, which has been bestowed upon the Muslims by the British, the last hope that ten crores [100 million] of Muslims who have been divided into various parts would continue their struggle for freedom has been lost. I, therefore, disband the movement."

Following Mashraqi's announcement, many Khaksars remained in Delhi. They continued to march and hold demonstrations against the Government. At times, police used tear gas to disburse them and many were injured and arrested.¹⁰ Nevertheless, they remained in Delhi for quite some time with lasting hopes of implementing their plan.

As time passed, it became evident that no amount of resistance could now prevent the division of India, as the departing rulers were intent on – among other factors - creating a buffer state to stop the spread of communism in the region. So, borders were adjusted, Punjab and

Bengal were partitioned and a truncated Pakistan was established. Thus two countries, India and Pakistan, emerged in the midst of a bloody partition in August, 1947. The Muslims lost their heritage along with the country that was once ruled by their ancestors. This distressed and disappointed nationalist Muslims. There were celebrations, but at the same time there were also people among Muslims and non-Muslims who wept bitterly upon the division of India. The sixty percent of Muslims who did not come to Pakistan were saddened by the partitioning of their homeland and they grieved the massive killings of loved ones parting from their families.

Allama Mashraqi passed away on August 27, 1963. His death was not only widely mourned in Pakistan, but all across the world, wherever his followers and supporters lived. People from all walks of life paid rich tributes to him. Well over 100,000 people - from Pakistan and abroad - came to attend his funeral procession, which was over a mile long. I witnessed this tragic event firsthand, as I was on the vehicle carrying Mashraqi's body for the duration of the procession. At the funeral, people lined the streets for hours awaiting the passing of his coffin en route to its final destination. They climbed poles, trees, and balconies to catch a final glimpse of their beloved leader. Flower petals were showered upon him during his journey to the grave and people wept uncontrollably throughout the procession. At his burial, the Khaksars fired 101 shots as a mark of respect and laid their leader for eternal rest with tears. With Allama Mashraqi's death, an important chapter of the history of the Indian sub-continent came to an end.

Conclusion

Throughout the entire struggle for the freedom of India, the Khaksars showed unwavering loyalty to Mashraqi and the Tehreek. Their remarkable unity and devotion was a source of fear for anti-Khaksar elements. Even after the brutality with which the Khaksars were treated, particularly following the massacre on March 19, 1940, the Movement remained intact.

The Khaksars took their lead from Mashraqi, who remained eternally devoted to the cause, despite having to endure sufferings that were unthinkable for most other leaders of his time. From 1930 to the creation of Pakistan, Mashraqi was arrested about a half dozen times, in addition to having restrictions placed on his movements. He was treated unjustly and inhumanly. His beloved son, Ehsanullah Khan Aslam, was murdered and his other sons were arrested. He was chased by intelligence agencies and warned of severe repercussions, his family members were intimidated, and his pension and bank accounts were frozen. Even his followers were beaten (in public or in jail), arrested, or killed. Through it all, Mashraqi never surrendered to the wrath of the authorities or other anti-Khaksar elements.

The Government of British India, with all their might and resources, could not crush the movement. The Khaksar Movement strengthened the public's resolve to rise against the imperial power. Their activities kept the masses focused on independence and sent a direct ultimatum to the British to leave India. Furthermore, their efforts never went unnoticed by authorities all the way up to the Secretary of State for India in London, who obviously reported matters to the Prime Minister of Great Britain. Historical documents are witness to the fact that the Khaksar resistance against the British was one of the 20th century's longest and toughest battles. History also shows that resistance and freedom are solemnly bound; there cannot be freedom without resistance. Those who think that India obtained its freedom solely on the basis of a constitutional fight are ignoring the fact that behind this was a major struggle orchestrated by the Khaksars and others. Indeed, through resistance and sheer determination, Mashraqi and the Khaksars had effectively shaken the pillars of colonial rule in British India.¹¹

It is clear then that Allama Mashraqi was instrumental in gaining India's independence from Britain. Yet, Pakistani and Indian historians have avoided discussion of him and the

Khaksar Tehreek. Why? They have ignored Mashraqi because he fought for a united India and considered partition on the basis of a two-nation theory to be an impractical idea. Mashraqi believed that it was not right to use Islam or communalism to divide India, an issue over which he had political differences with Quaid-e-Azam. So, Mashraqi's role is ignored in order to avoid any criticism against Quaid-e-Azam or the All-India Muslim League. Furthermore, pro-Leaguers do not wish to acknowledge that the Muslim League's emergence as the popular party was linked to the banning of the Khaksar Tehreek (a fact that is agreed upon by unbiased historians). This is further evidenced by Sunil Chander's article (published in a scholarly journal) in which he wrote that the Khaksars "contributed indirectly to the emergence of the Muslim League as a popular party" (Chander 1987, 306). Indian historians avoid discussion on him because, to them, Mashraqi's Khaksar Movement was meant to bring Muslim rule in India, despite the fact that Mashraqi strived for Hindu Muslim-unity and love and service to all. The aforementioned reasons help to explain why the extensive Khaksar materials (from 1930-1963) have not been made available in libraries and research on Mashraqi has been discouraged.¹² People have not been allowed to criticize partition, particularly in Pakistan; freedom of speech and tolerance have yet to prevail.

The other question is why Mashraqi was against partition in the first place. The short answer to this question is that, in the partition scheme, he not only saw the destruction of British India, but also the massacre and ruins of millions of people. He realized that the division would serve only vested interests. It saddened Mashraqi that not only was British India divided into three parts, but the Muslims thereby were divided into three parts as well. Mashraqi was distressed by the fact that the communalist nature of the partition resulted in the massacre of over a million innocent people, including Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. It also led to the disintegration

of a large number of families on both sides. Women were abducted and other atrocities were inflicted on the Indians. As a humanist, it was unbearable for Mashraqi to see the destruction of human life.

Mashraqi was disappointed in Muslim and Hindu leaders, who had failed to unite, despite his sincere efforts to reach a compromise; they accepted the division of India as a solution to the communal issues, which Mashraqi felt could have been resolved if the forces that were behind the Muslim-Hindu rift were tackled properly. The only joy resulting from partition for nationalist Muslims was that foreign rule had come to an end.

People sometimes ask me, “If Mashraqi’s fight was for the freedom of British India and against partition, then why should he be among the founding fathers of Pakistan?” My response is that Mashraqi remained one of the foremost Muslim figures on the political stage of the sub-continent for a long time. His services for the cause of unity, his contributions toward freedom, and his struggle to empower people cannot be ignored. His services for people on both sides of the border shall always be well regarded by those who knew him or have come to learn about him. Ultimately, I believe that anyone who sacrificed and fought as much as Mashraqi for the freedom of British India is, in fact, a founding father of both Pakistan and India.

Mashraqi’s message to the world was one of brotherhood, equality, and elimination of sectarianism and prejudices. He wanted to uplift the masses. The Khaksar flag and the writing on the badge that every Khaksar wore speak of his philosophy: *Akuwat* (or brotherhood). The 15 points decree that he issued in 1937 further speaks of his ideology:

“We, Khaksars, stand for the establishment of an order that will be equal, non-communal and tolerant, yet non-subservient, by the crushing of all communal sentiment and religious prejudices of mankind by our good and serviceful conduct; an order which will afford proper

treatment and protection to all communities and will be founded on eternal justice, goodness and goodwill.”

“The Khaksar stands for (a) regard for the religious and social sentiments of all communities, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsi, Christian, Jew, and Untouchable etc., (b) maintenance of their particular culture and customs and (c) general tolerance; and believes this policy to be the secret of Muslim rule in India for a thousand years.”

Hopefully, this article would be enlightening to people, particularly those from the Indian sub-continent, in understanding more about their history. There are many facts that still need to be explored in the history of the sub-continent. A day will come when people will finally discover the truth.

Notes

1. The offers of Ambassadorship and Knighthood were extended by Sir Alfred Hamilton Grant, Chief Commissioner of the North West Frontier Province. The Chief Commissioner was equivalent to the Governor at that time.
2. Mashraqi had started working on his program while he was in Government service.
3. On May 06, 1940, the Governor of Punjab wrote to the Viceroy of India that 32 Khaksars were killed.
4. According to Mashraqi's family, Ehsanullah Khan Aslam was deliberately hit.
5. According to Khaksar circles, this figure was much understated by the Government.
6. Also see the telegrams of Polindia, Simla to Resident, Hyderabad dated June 06, 1941 and Political Agent, Bhopal dated June 07, 1942 (APAC, IOL L/P&J/8/680, p. 73, 80).

7. An intelligence report issued in March 31, 1943, referring to the same speech, mentioned that the Khaksar Tehrik was actuated “to wake up the sleeping Muslim nation and to serve humanity” (APAC, IOL L/P&J/8/680, prepared by Punjab C.I.D., 1941, p. 33-36).
8. See Mashraqi’s letter to Quaid-e-Azam dated August 01, 1944 (Yousaf 2004, 276) and Mashraqi’s telegrams to Quaid-e-Azam and Gandhi dated December 19, 1944 (Yousaf 2004, 281).
9. The Government announced the failure of the London Conference on December 06, 1946.
10. On July 24, 1947, police opened fired on the Khaksars in Delhi. Police entered mosques to chase the Khaksars and dragged them to jail. During this period, Mashraqi’s son was also arrested. In jail, the Khaksars were fired at four times (see Mashraqi’s telegram to Mountbatten on October 10, 1947). Syed Shabbir Hussain also wrote in his book *Al-Mashriqi: The Disowned Genius*, “In jail, too, they [Khaksars] were fired at least thrice during which several Khaksars lost their lives” (Hussain 1991, 235).
11. Those who believe that the battle for freedom cannot be won with spades do not understand the meaning of human resistance.
12. A lot of material is still lying undiscovered in the National Archives of India, India Office Library in London and research locations in Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan has made no effort to publish and properly catalog it for researchers.

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